SECRET EMPIRE™

MARVEL

#4

NICK SPENCER, LEINIL FRANCIS YU, ROD REIS, JOSHUA CASSARA

WE WERE BESET BY EVIL.

SNAP!

DANGERS LURKED AROUND EVERY CORNER.

WE WERE OUTNUMBERED...

ATTACKED...

OVERCOME.

WE REALIZED, IF WE WERE TO *SURVIVE* THIS--

HEY THERE, FRIEND...

YOU LOOK LIKE YOU COULD USE A HAND.

--WE COULDN'T DO IT ALONE.

...WHO ARE YOU TWO, THEN?

I IMAGINE WE'RE JUST LIKE YOU...

...COUPLE OF TRAVELERS, TRYING TO MAKE SOME SENSE OF THIS PLACE.

BOTH OF US FIGURED OUT EARLY ON, ALL THE DANGERS LURKING AROUND-- DIDN'T HURT TO HAVE SOMEONE WATCHING YOUR BACK.

THAT'S A GOOD IDEA--I'VE BEEN...ON MY OWN OUT HERE FOR A WHILE.

WELL, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE ANYMORE.

THAT'S RIGHT. WE WERE GONNA HEAD A LITTLE BIT FARTHER UP THE HILL, THEN MAKE CAMP. YOU'RE WELCOME TO JOIN.

I--I DON'T KNOW. I FEEL LIKE--LIKE THERE'S SOMETHING I'M SUPPOSED TO *DO*--

AND YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO DO IT ON YOUR OWN? IT'S YOUR CALL, STRANGER, BUT IN MY EXPERIENCE--

--WE COULD ALL USE *FRIENDS.*

AND SO, IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS, WE FOUND HOPE IN FRIENDSHIP--

--IN *FAMILY.*

SECRET EMPIRE

Steve Rogers, A.K.A. Captain America, has claimed the United States for Hydra. The handful of heroes who escaped his initial attack discovered that a Cosmic Cube was behind Steve Rogers' sinister change of heart, and might be able to change him back--if the scattered pieces could be reunited.

Tony Stark and his team convinced Sam Wilson to smuggle them out of the country, but their destination was more dangerous than he let on. Captain America is after the cube as well, and to get the first shard, both factions will have to tangle with Ultron himself.

Meanwhile, Black Widow and her group of younger heroes are closing in on a less merciful way to deal with Captain America.

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Hydra

Hydra Command

Captain America

Kraken

Baron Zemo

The Punisher

Avengers

Scarlet Witch

Odinson

Superior Octopus

Black Ant

Taskmaster

The Underground

Tony Stark (A.I.)

Ant-Man

Hercules

Quicksilver

Mockingbird

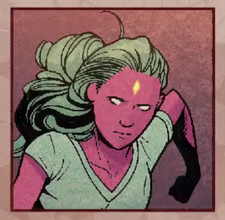
Sam Wilson

The Red Room

Black Widow

Wasp

Spider-Man


Viv Vision

Ironheart

Falcon

Atlantis

Namor

BALTIMORE.

THERE HE IS, AT LAST--

--THE ELUSIVE *PUNISHER.*

WE'VE BEEN LOOKING EVERYWHERE FOR YOU, CASTLE. THIS IS THE SIXTH SAFEHOUSE WE TRIED.

NEED I REMIND YOU YOU'RE ON A *VITAL MISSION,* AND WHEN YOU DON'T REPORT IN--

I DON'T ANSWER TO YOU, KRAKEN.

WHAT ABOUT ME, THEN?

CAP...

HELLO, FRANK.

AT EASE, SOLDIER. I'M SORRY TO INTRUDE LIKE THIS--PLEASE KNOW IT'S ONLY BECAUSE WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME. DO YOU HAVE ANY LEADS?

YES SIR, A FEW--I CAME CLOSE IN NEWARK, BROUGHT HOME SOLID INTEL. WE'LL HAVE HER IN OUR SIGHTS SOON.

THAT'S A RELIEF TO HEAR--RIGHT NOW THINGS ARE...*CHALLENGING,* TO PUT IT MILDLY. WE'RE UNDER ATTACK. LOT OF FOLKS OUT THERE ARE TRYING TO UNDO EVERYTHING WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED.

YOU'VE BEEN MY TRUSTED LIEUTENANT THROUGH ALL THIS, FRANK--BUT I NEED YOU NOW MORE THAN EVER, YOU UNDERSTAND?

WE MAY BE BESET BY THREATS ON ALL SIDES, BUT BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU--

"--NONE OF THEM ARE AS DANGEROUS AS ***THE BLACK WIDOW.***"

I'M RUNNING OUT OF PATIENCE, BOY-- WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME IN RETURN?

C-C-CUT OFF ONE LIMB, TWO MORE WILL TAKE ITS PLACE...

THAT IS THE SAYING, YES--

--BUT I'VE ALWAYS ***WONDERED,*** WHAT HAPPENS IF I CUT OFF YOUR--

WIDOW!

THAT'S ENOUGH.

FOR REAL. I CAN'T LISTEN TO THAT DUDE SCREAM ANYMORE.

THE ONE TIME YOU ALL DON'T HAVE THOSE DAMN EARBUDS IN...

THIS MAN HAS INFORMATION WE ***NEED.*** SO, WE ARE SIMPLY HAVING A CONVERSATION. ABOUT ***KNIVES.***

THIS IS TORTURE, AND ALL FOR NOTHING. HE DOESN'T ***KNOW*** ANYTHING!

HE HAS ***NO RANK.*** HE'S ***BARELY*** OLDER THAN WE ARE.

S'TRUE...I JUST WORK IN THE MESS HALL...

YES, NADIA-- THE MESS HALL AT THE SOUTHERN VIRGINIA HYDRA INSTALLATION...

...THE SAME ONE WHOSE STAFF HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH CATERING THE ***REBUILDING CEREMONY*** AT THE CAPITOL.

HE WAS GIVEN A TOUR OF THE SITE--LOGISTICS WERE DISCUSSED. WHICH MEANS--

--SOMEONE NEEDS TO GO AND GET ME SOME *DUCT TAPE* AND A *BLANKET.*

NO. WE SAID THAT IS ENOUGH.

YOU REALLY THINK I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BRING DOWN A *SYNTHEZOID,* VIV?

GUYS, COME ON-- MAYBE THERE'S ANOTHER WAY--

EVEN YOU, SPIDER-MAN. DISAPPOINTING.

WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST WE DO THEN? LET HIM GO? HE'S *SEEN* US. HE WOULD REPORT BACK WITH OUR QUESTIONS--

NO, HE WOULDN'T--

--I'VE GOT AN APP FOR THAT.

SERIOUSLY?

YEAH. SOMETHING I WORKED ON A WHILE BACK--INDUCES SHORT-TERM MEMORY LOSS USING UV LIGHT RESPONSES. I WAS GONNA USE IT FOR MORE...*THERAPEUTIC* PURPOSES, BUT HEY--

--IT'LL DO.

T-THANK YOU...

HAIL HYDRA!

BLAM BLAM

BLAM

WONDERFUL.

NOW WE HAVE TO SWITCH MOTELS.

"I NEED YOU TO FIND HER, FRANK. EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON THAT. BUT I DON'T ENVY YOU THE TASK.

"NOBODY WORKS IN THE SHADOWS BETTER THAN NATASHA ROMANOFF. SHE DOESN'T LEAVE A TRAIL. AT THIS POINT, SHE COULD BE A MILLION MILES AWAY--

"--OR SHE COULD BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU."

MOTEL

BALTIMORE.

ALASKA.

"THEY'RE CALLING THEM THE *ULTRONIC TERRITORIES*--
WELL, THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEY EVEN *EXIST*, THAT IS.

"BASICALLY, NOT LONG BEFORE THE PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD WENT UP, ULTRON RETURNED FROM THE STARS.

"BUT INSTEAD OF TRYING TO DESTROY THE WORLD OR ATTACK THE AVENGERS OR WHATEVER, AS USUAL, HE SET UP SHOP IN A REMOTE BIT OF ALASKA AND STARTED BUILDING CITIES--

"--CITIES FULL OF *MORE ULTRONS.*

"HYDRA DENIES ANY OF IT EVEN *EXISTS*, BUT THERE ARE RUMORS OF SOME KIND OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES, WHICH MAKES SENSE--

"--SEEING AS ULTRON HAS THE THING STEVE AND HIS CRONIES WANT MORE THAN ANYTHING--

"--A COSMIC CUBE FRAGMENT."

BUT *WE'RE* GOING TO GET IT FIRST.

THIS IS OUR MISSION, PEOPLE--A *STEALTH* MISSION.

GET IN, GET THE CUBE FRAGMENT, GET OUT--

--DON'T GET SEEN. DO **NOT** ANGER THE GIANT ANDROID ARMY.

WE ARE NOT HERE TO START A ***WAR,*** ONLY TO TAKE WHAT'S ***OURS.***

ANY QUESTIONS?

UM--I HAVE A QUESTION, TONY.

YES, SCOTT?

ARE WE, *UM--**SURE*** THAT'S ULTRON? BECAUSE THE LAST PICTURES I SAW LOOKED KINDA LIKE--

HANK PYM. ULTRON'S CREATOR. THE ROBOT WEARS HIS FACE LIKE A TROPHY, BUT IT IS ***NOT*** HIM. I REPEAT--

*IF YOU SOMEHOW RUN INTO ULTRON--NO MATTER WHAT HE SAYS--NO MATTER WHAT HE **DOES**--HE IS **NOT** YOUR OLD PAL HANK, GOT IT?*

HE IS, IN FACT, MORE POWERFUL THAN HE HAS EVER BEEN--

"--AND MORE *DANGEROUS.*"

THEY'VE ARRIVED, SIR.

YES, JARVIS, I'M AWARE. THANK YOU.

I *HATE* TO SEE THEM LIKE THIS, YOU KNOW.

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE A TEAM. A *FAMILY.* NOW LOOK AT US--DIVIDED, TORN APART.

BUT ALL IS NOT LOST. I CAN *FIX* THIS--I CAN MAKE THINGS *RIGHT*--

--HANK PYM IS GOING TO *SAVE* THE AVENGERS!

SETTING HER DOWN JUST OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER...

BOBBI-- ANY ALARM BELLS?

SO FAR, ALL CLEAR. BUT YOU'RE WELCOME TO COME SEE FOR YOURSELF, SAM--

THANKS BUT NO THANKS.

I TOLD YOU I WOULD GET YOU OUT OF THE COUNTRY. AND I *DID*. I DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR ULTRON FIGHT NUMBER 582. THAT'S NOT WHAT I *DO* ANYMORE.

AND IT WOULD'VE BEEN *NICE* TO GET A LITTLE MORE HEADS-UP ON OUR *DESTINATION*, WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT--

YEAH, THAT'S MY FAULT. BUT IN MY DEFENSE--

--YOU NEVER WOULD'VE SAID YES.

AND HEY, DON'T BE SO PESSIMISTIC. WE DO THIS RIGHT, ULTRON WILL BE SNORING AWAY IN HIS *JAMMIES* THE WHOLE TIME WE'RE HERE.

I SAY *LET* THE TYRANT SHOW HIMSELF. *OH*, TO DO BATTLE, AFTER ALL THIS HIDING AND RUNNING--

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, HERCULES. ULTRON SHOWS HIMSELF, I *WILL* BE RUNNING. AS I DO.

WELL, IN A FEW MINUTES WE SHOULD AT LEAST BE ABLE TO TELL YOU WHICH DIRECTION TO GO, PIETRO.

ASSUMING ANT-MAN CAN GET INTO THE *MAINFRAME*--

OH YEAH, BOBBI, DON'T WORRY-- ALMOST--

--THERE.

SCOTT? WHAT *WAS* THAT?

IT'S HIM--HE'S *HERE*--

WHO?!

THE *OTHER* ANT-MAN! THE ONE *NOBODY LIKES!*

SORRY-- CAN YOU BE MORE SPECIFIC?

I'M CALLED *THE BLACK ANT,* DAD JEANS--

OKAY, LOOK ALIVE, PEOPLE, SOUNDS LIKE WE GOT COMPANY.

OH, YEAH HONEY--

--THE WORST KIND.

TASKMASTER!

JERK.

HEY, WHAT THE HELL IS GOING *ON* OUT THERE? IS EVERYBODY--

OOOFFF!!

DANGER'S AFOOT. THANK THE GODS.

I'LL GO--

--HAVE A LOOK.

WANDA?

SISTER?

QUICKSILVER! DO NOT WORRY, I WILL SAVE YOU, MY FRIEND!

I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT, HERCULES. PLEASE-- STAND ASIDE. I HAVE NO QUARREL WITH YOU.

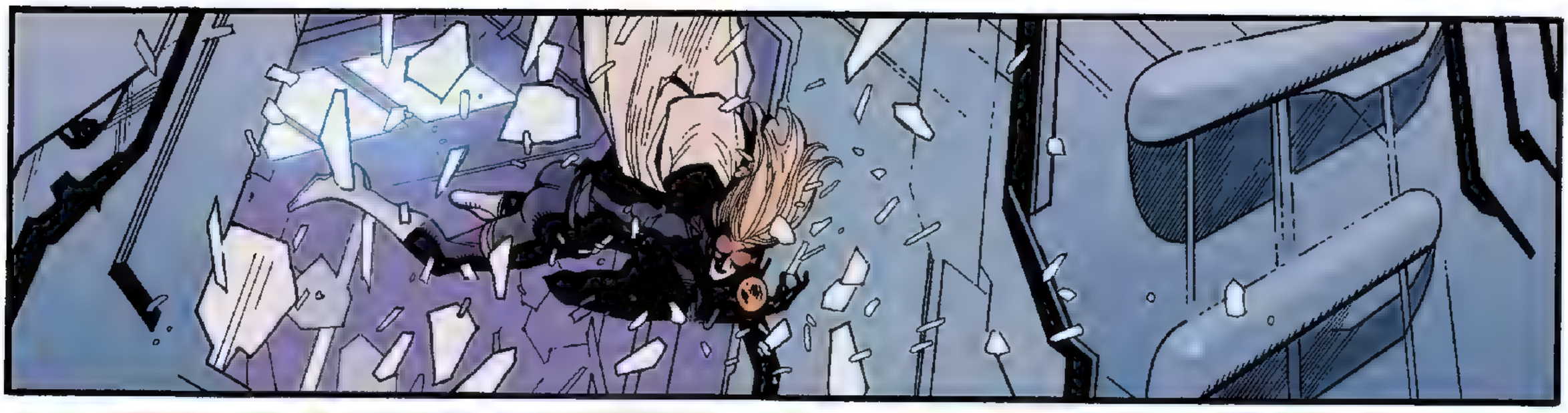
ODINSON--

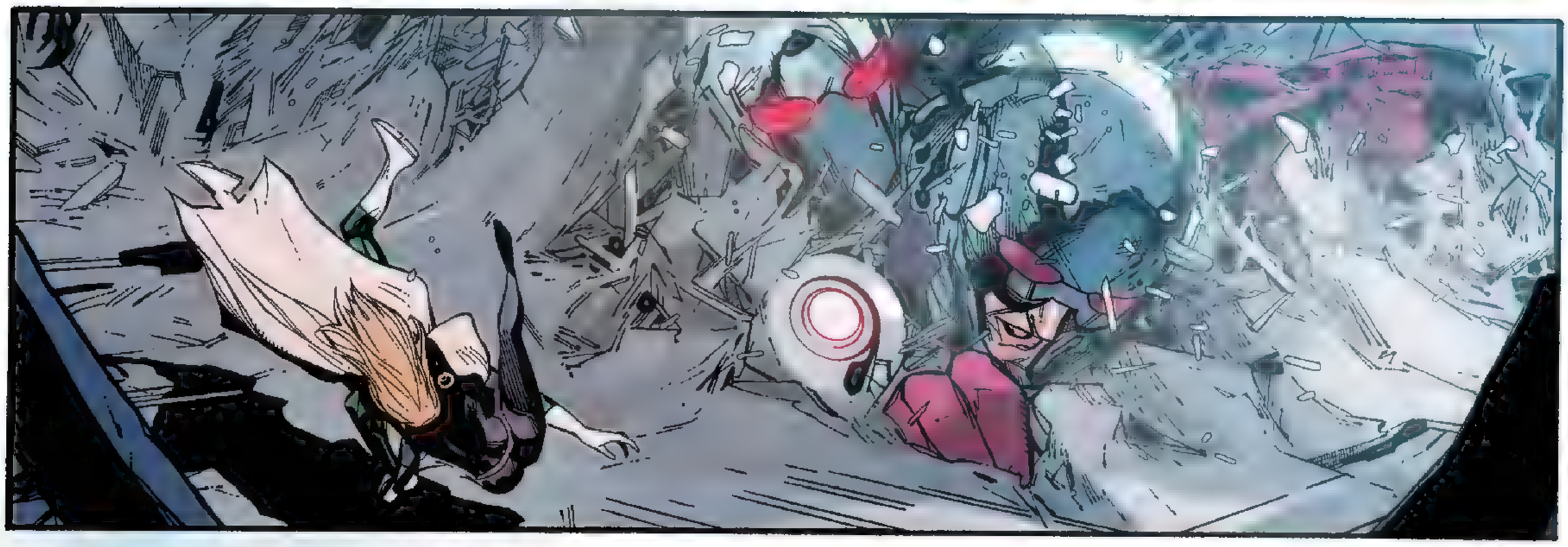
UH, FOLKS-- WHATEVER'S GOING ON OUT THERE, FRIENDLY LITTLE REMINDER THAT WE ARE IN A CITY OF **KILLER ROBOTS** AND THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A--

TRAITOR!

--STEALTH MISSION.

=SIGH=





TONY.

STEVE.

NOT GONNA LIE--I'M ACTUALLY **VERY** EXCITED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF KICKING YOUR ASS AND NOBODY BEING MAD AT ME FOR IT AFTERWARDS.

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO'S BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS, TONY...

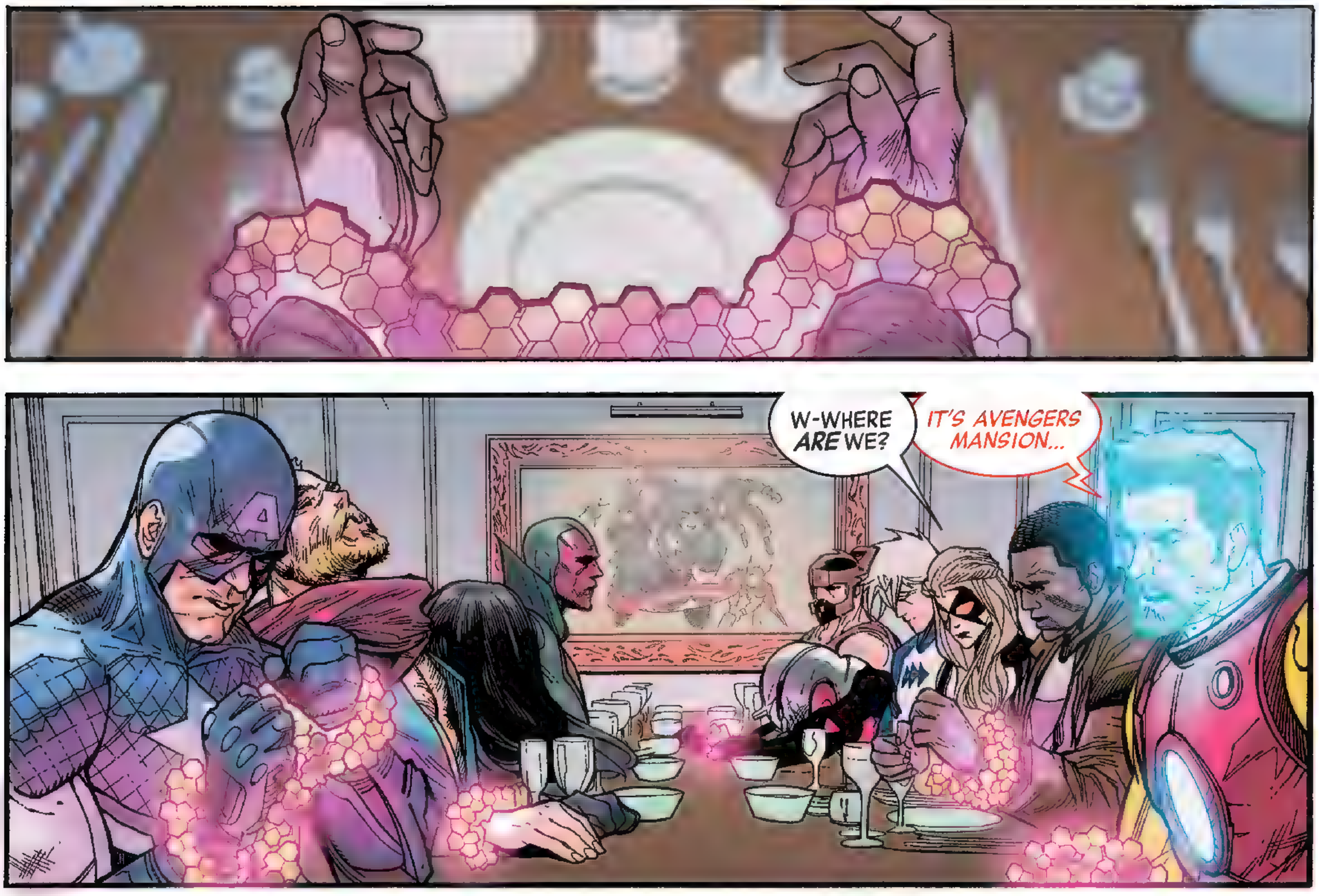
NO, NO, NO--THIS WON'T DO--

--THIS WON'T DO AT ALL.

I'M SORRY IT HAD TO BE THIS WAY...

...BUT PLEASE KNOW I HAVE MISSED YOU ALL SO DEARLY--

"--AND IT'S SO GOOD TO WELCOME YOU HOME AGAIN."


W-WHERE ARE WE?
IT'S AVENGERS MANSION...

SOME KIND OF REPLICA OF IT.
SERIOUSLY-- WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?
THIS? OH, IT'S NOTHING--

--JUST A LITTLE SOMETHING I WHIPPED UP IN THE KITCHEN.
HONESTLY, JARVIS HERE DID MOST OF THE WORK.
KISS THE OVERLORD

OKAY, THIS IS OFFICIALLY THE CREEPIEST THING I HAVE EVER BEEN A PART OF.

AGREED. ULTRON--YOU WILL RELEASE US, NOW--

ULTRON?

THOR--DON'T YOU *RECOGNIZE* ME? CAN'T YOU SEE MY *FACE?*

IT'S YOUR OLD PAL-- *HANK PYM!*

KISS THE WORD

THEN AGAIN--I LOOK AROUND THIS TABLE, AND I DON'T REALLY RECOGNIZE MOST OF *YOU* THESE DAYS EITHER...

WELL, I CAN HELP WITH THAT--*HE'S* HAD HIS REALITY REWRITTEN BY A COSMIC CUBE, *SHE'S* POSSESSED BY A DEMON, *HE'S* INFECTED BY SOME A.I. VIRUS--

--AND THIS ONE JUST WANTS HIS *HAMMER* BACK, I THINK.

ACTUALLY, TONY--

--I WAS REFERRING TO *YOUR* SIDE OF THE TABLE. OR MORE SPECIFICALLY-- YOU, IN FACT.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT CHARMING, CHARISMATIC FIGURE WE WERE ALL SO IN *AWE* OF BACK THEN? WHO IS THIS MANIC, NERVOUS, OVERREACHING MESS OF A MAN IN HIS PLACE?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. I KNOW IT'S YOU IN THERE--YOU'RE WEARING YOUR OLD ARMOR. WHAT'S THE POINT OF THAT? *NOSTALGIA?*

HH. HARDLY--

FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE'S SO INEBRIATED HE CAN'T *PILOT* THE NEWER MODELS. TOO COMPLICATED, RIGHT, TONY?

WOW, EVEN WHEN HE'S **HYDRA**, HE STILL LECTURES EVERYONE...

YOU SPEAK OF *STARK'S* FOLLIES? THE ODINSON DISGRACES US *ALL!*

WATCH YOUR *TONGUE*, GODLING. I DO WHAT I MUST--FOR THOSE I LOVE AND FOR ASGARD--

THE ONES *YOU* LOVE?!

TO *HELL* WITH THIS WAR--I DON'T CARE WHO WINS--ALL I CARE ABOUT IS MY *SISTER*. WANDA--CAN YOU HEAR ME?!

YOUR SISTER IS GONE, BOY--ONLY *CHTHON* REMAINS...

BUT IT'S GREAT TO KNOW HOW DEVOTED YOU ARE TO THE *CAUSE*, PIETRO.

I THINK WHAT THE LADY IS TRYING TO SAY IS--

ENOUGH!!!

LISTEN TO YOURSELVES--THIS CONSTANT BICKERING AND BATTLING, ALWAYS AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS... IT'S ALL YOU EVER *DO* ANYMORE! WHAT'S *HAPPENED* TO YOU?! WHERE DID IT ALL GO SO *WRONG?!*

YOU KNOW, IT'S JUST *EXHAUSTING*--AND IN THIS FORM, I CAN'T EVEN *BE* EXHAUSTED! I GO THROUGH ALL THIS TROUBLE TO BRING US BACK TOGETHER, AND YOU JUST--YOU JUST--

KISS

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW *WHY* ULTRON BUILT THIS CITY?

WHY HE DIDN'T COME AFTER YOU YET AGAIN?

IT'S BECAUSE HE DIDN'T *HAVE* TO. IT'S BECAUSE HE LOOKED AT YOU AND YOUR *WAR*, TONY, AND YOU AND YOUR *SCHEMING*, STEVE--

--AND HE REALIZED HE WOULDN'T HAVE TO DESTROY *ANYTHING*--

--BECAUSE *YOU* WERE ALREADY DOING IT FOR HIM.

YOU WERE GOING TO TEAR EACH OTHER APART, AND BURN DOWN EVERYTHING YOU BUILT IN THE PROCESS. HE DIDN'T NEED TO LIFT A FINGER--

--HE JUST NEEDED TO *WAIT.*

KISS THE OVERLORD

ULTRON--I HAPPEN TO AGREE WITH YOU...

...BUT HYDRA IS GOING TO ***CHANGE*** ALL OF THAT--BRING AN END TO ALL THIS WEAKNESS AND ***CORRUPTION***...

OH, OF COURSE IT WILL, STEVE--OF COURSE--

--JUST LIKE TONY'S GRAND PLANS FOR SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION MADE EVERYTHING ***SO*** MUCH BETTER.

KISS THE OVERLORD

OR PERHAPS YOU MEAN LIKE WHEN ***WANDA*** HERE TRIED TO FIX EVERYTHING--THAT GOT A BIT ***MESSY*** AS I RECALL...

S'TRUE. I GOT BLOWN UP.

YOU ALWAYS HAVE SUCH BIG IDEAS FOR SOLVING ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS. FUNNY, THEN, HOW YOU JUST KEEP MAKING EVERYTHING ***WORSE.***

BUT THAT'S WHY I BROUGHT YOU HERE--SO THAT WE COULD SIT AND HAVE A NICE DINNER TOGETHER, BREAK BREAD AND LAUGH, LIKE IN THE OLD DAYS--RECONNECT WITH WHAT WE'VE LOST--

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN NOSTALGIA. YOU HAVE SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO HYDRA--

AND ***WE*** HAVE A SLIGHTLY ***DIFFERENT*** INTERPRETATION OF WHO IT BELONGS TO.

=SIGH= OF COURSE, THEY ONLY VISIT WHEN THEY ***WANT*** THINGS...

SAM, PLEASE--BE REASONABLE HERE--IF THIS ESCALATES--

DON'T. DON'T TALK TO ME LIKE YOU'RE MY ***FRIEND***--

STOP! MY GOD, YOU PEOPLE--IT ***NEVER*** CHANGES! HAVE YOU NOT HEARD A ***WORD*** I'VE SAID?!

KISS THE OVERLORD

I'M TRYING TO *HELP* YOU! I'M *ALWAYS* TRYING TO HELP YOU--

--BUT YOU NEVER, EVER LISTEN TO ME, *DO* YOU?!

IF *ROGERS* SAYS "ASSEMBLE," YOU ALL CAN'T RUN INTO A FIRE FAST ENOUGH--AND IF *STARK* SAYS HE HAS SOME BIG IDEA, HALF OF YOU WILL HAPPILY LINE UP BEHIND HIM NO MATTER *HOW* TERRIBLE IT IS!

KISS THE

WHAT ABOUT *ME*?! I'M A *FOUNDING AVENGER!* I DESERVE SOME *RESPECT!* I *DESERVE* TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY! I--

HA HA HA HA HA!

HA HA HA!

IS SOMETHING *FUNNY*, TONY?

N-NO, NO, SORRY, IT'S JUST-- I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT--I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS ACTUALLY YOU UNTIL JUST NOW...

*...BUT THAT-- THAT IS **THE MOST** HANK PYM THING I HAVE EVER HEARD ANYONE SAY.*

KISS

IS THAT WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING UP HERE THIS WHOLE TIME? SITTING IN THIS DOLLHOUSE, FEELING **SORRY** FOR YOURSELF?

TONY... DON'T--

I'M JUST SAYING--IT'S KIND OF **AMAZING**, RIGHT? THE ONE THING THAT FINALLY STOPPED ULTRON FOR GOOD WAS HANK PYM'S ALL-DEVOURING, ALL-CONSUMING **INFERIORITY COMPLEX.**

UH, TONY, HATE TO SAY IT, BUT MAYBE STEVE IS RIGHT. BRING IT DOWN A NOTCH--

NO, I DON'T THINK SO, SAM--

--I NEED TO GET THIS OFF MY CHEST. OF ALL THE PEOPLE TO LECTURE--YOU WANT TO KNOW WHEN IT ALL WENT WRONG, **"HANK"**? BECAUSE **I** HAVE A THEORY--

WILL SOMEONE ***PLEASE*** SOBER UP HIS SETTINGS?

TO BE FAIR, THIS IS PRETTY IN LINE WITH THE WHOLE FAMILY DINNER MOTIF, AT LEAST IN MY EXPERIENCE.

IT WAS **YOU.**

I DON'T MEAN YOU CREATING ULTRON, HAVING YOUR LITTLE BREAKDOWN AFTERWARD, BETRAYING ALL OF US-- THAT DID A LOT OF DAMAGE TO US. AS A TEAM, SURE. BUT AS A **FAMILY?**

YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY WE STOPPED HAVING THESE DINNERS? PARTIES OUT BY THE POOL? WHY ALL THAT **ENDED?**

IT'S BECAUSE THEY GOT TO BE TOO AWKWARD. TOO UNCOMFORTABLE. IT WAS HARD FOR PEOPLE TO ACT LIKE EVERYTHING WAS STILL OKAY, LIKE THEY WERE STILL OKAY WITH **YOU**--

--AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO **JAN.**

HOW DARE YOU?!

I DISCOVERED PYM PARTICLES! I TOOK ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL! I FOUNDED THE AVENGERS ACADEMY!

WHAT HAVE *YOU* EVER DONE?!

YOU WERE A *LOUT* AND A *CRETIN* WHO MADE HIS FORTUNE SELLING WEAPONS TO *MURDERERS.*

YOUR ARROGANCE STARTED *TWO* WARS--YOUR INCOMPETENCE PUT *NORMAN OBSORN* IN POWER! AND NOW YOU TRY TO LECTURE *ME?!*

EVERY DAY I HOLD THIS MONSTER INSIDE ME AT BAY--DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT HE WOULD *DO* IF I LET HIM LOOSE? HE WOULD INCINERATE THE FLESH OF EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD ON THIS EARTH AND *LAUGH* ABOUT IT!

EVERY DAY I LIVE WITH THIS, AND I SAVE THE WORLD A HUNDRED TIMES OVER! BUT I MADE *ONE* MISTAKE--

ONE MISTAKE!!!

YEARS AGO! AND IT'S ALL ANY OF YOU WILL EVER REMEMBER ME FOR-- ALL YOU EVER SAY ABOUT ME!

YOU THINK I DON'T HEAR THE WHISPERS?! THE WAY YOU *LOOK* AT ME WHEN I WALK INTO THE ROOM? THEN AGAIN--

--MAYBE I NEED TO GIVE THEM SOMETHING *ELSE* TO TALK ABOUT. MAYBE AFTER I *KILL* YOU--

HANK!

DON'T DO IT, MAN.

LISTEN, I KNOW THERE'S A LOT OF... *DRAMA* HERE, BUT--

--YOU AND ME, WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN COOL RIGHT? NOT TO BE ALL CHEESY OR WHATEVER, BUT... YOU'RE KINDA MY ROLE MODEL AND ALL THAT. YOU KNOW WHY THAT IS?

IT'S NOT JUST THE WHOLE "LET ME KEEP ONE OF HIS COSTUMES AND BECOME A SUPER HERO" THING--

--IT'S BECAUSE YOU SCREWED UP BIG TIME.

NOW, HOLD ON-- I DON'T MEAN THAT IN A *BAD* WAY! KINDA. SEE--

--I SCREWED UP BIG TIME, TOO. I MADE ONE MISTAKE AND IT PUT ME IN PRISON. COST ME MY FAMILY.

SO WHEN I MET YOU, I SAID TO MYSELF, HEY, THERE'S A GUY WHO DIDN'T LET THAT STUFF STOP HIM.

THERE'S A GUY WHO DID SOME STUFF HE REGRETS, BUT HE GOT RIGHT BACK UP AND KEPT TRYING TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT--

THAT HELPED ME. A LOT. IT DIDN'T GET ME ALL THE WAY TO WHERE I NEEDED TO BE, THOUGH. FOR THAT, I NEEDED *ANOTHER* PERSON TO LOOK UP TO.

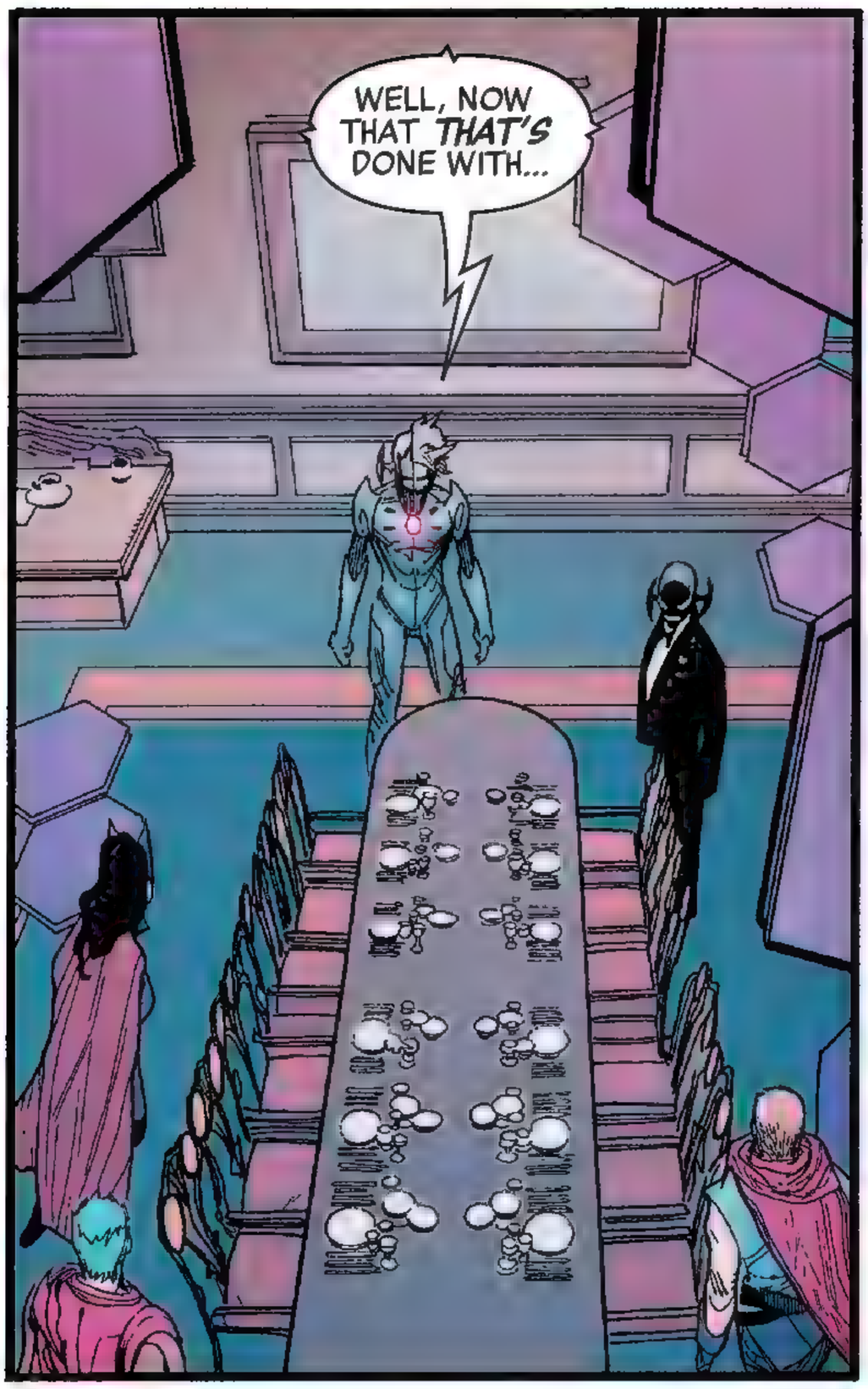
SEE, GUYS LIKE US, WE DON'T MAKE THE BEST DECISIONS ALL THE TIME. BUT WE HAVE PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES WHO ARE--WELL, A LOT BETTER THAN US.

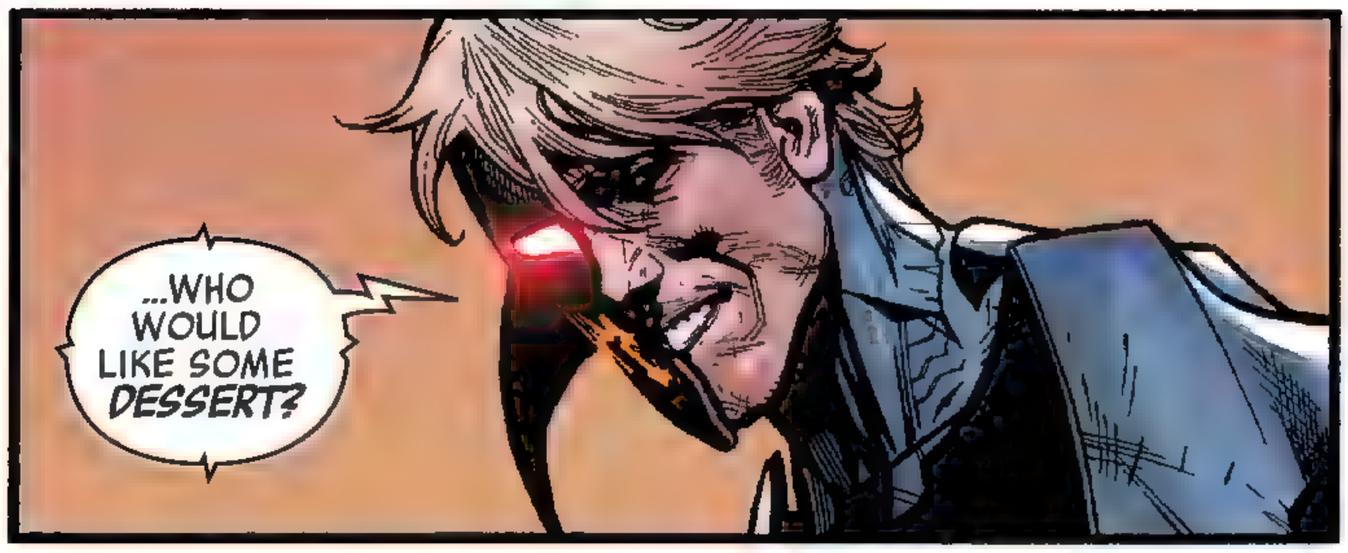
FOR ME, THAT'S MY DAUGHTER, CASSIE.

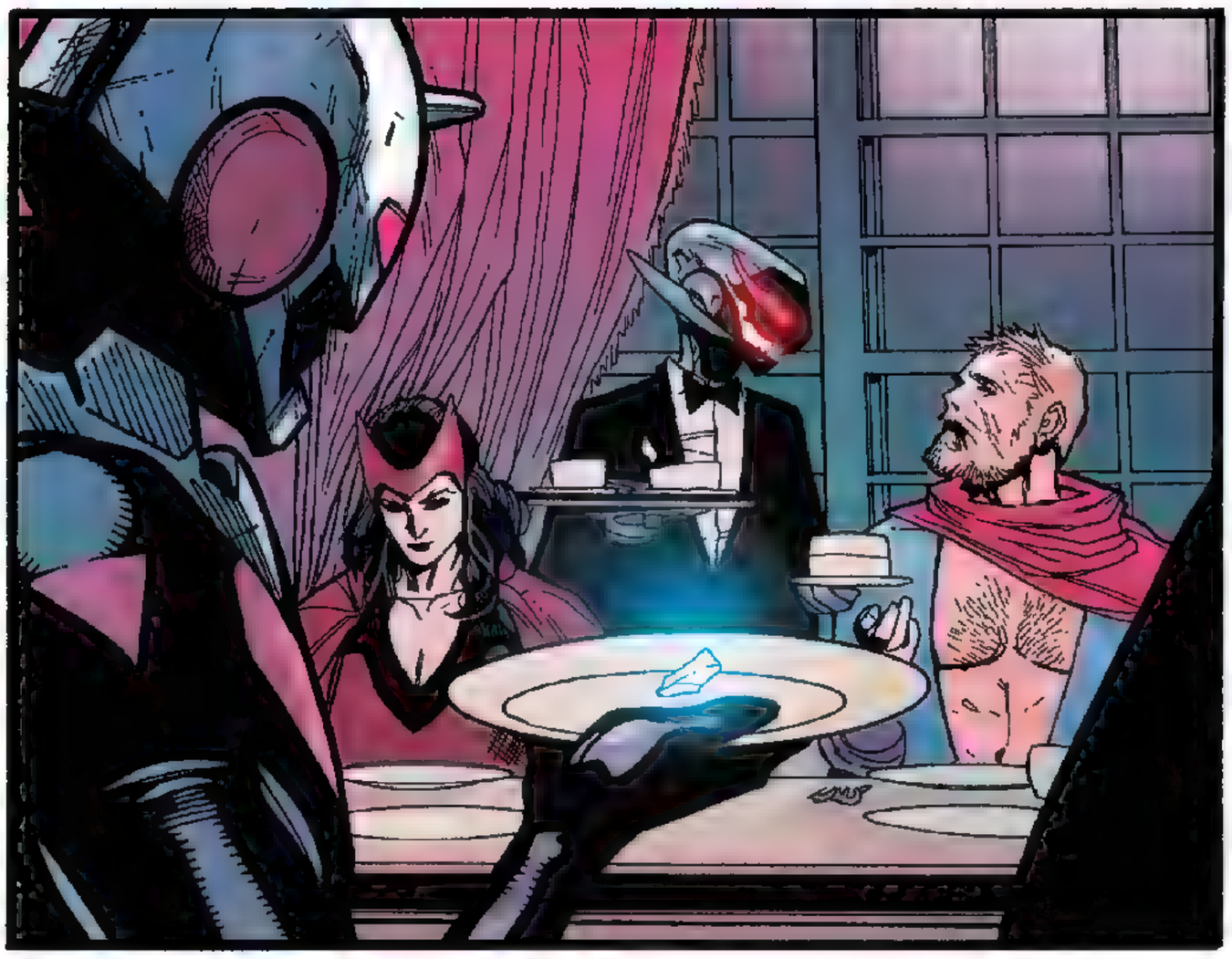
SO WHENEVER I GET STUCK IN A BAD PLACE, AND I HAVE A *CHOICE* TO MAKE--I TRY TO ASK MYSELF WHAT *SHE* WOULD DO.

AND I FIGURE, MAYBE A TRICK LIKE THAT COULD WORK FOR YOU, TOO. NOT WITH CASSIE, I GUESS-- THAT'D BE *WEIRD,* YOU DON'T REALLY *KNOW* HER THAT WELL. BUT IF YOU REALLY *ARE* HANK, MAYBE YOU COULD ASK YOURSELF--

--WHAT WOULD *JANET* WANT YOU TO DO RIGHT NOW?


WELL, NOW THAT *THAT'S* DONE WITH...


...WHO WOULD LIKE SOME *DESSERT?*



FAREWELL! SAFE TRAVELS!

ENJOY THE CUBE FRAGMENT, SCOTT!

I'LL MAKE SURE YOU'RE HEADING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION FROM YOU-KNOW-WHO...

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. NOW.

WAY AHEAD OF YOU.

OH, BUT--TONY? TONY?

I JUST WANTED TO SAY, I'M SORRY IF THINGS GOT A LITTLE...TESTY BACK AT DINNER. TRUTH BE TOLD, I THINK THIS LITTLE ADVENTURE WILL BE GOOD FOR YOU.

IS THAT RIGHT?

MM. YOU DIDN'T GET HERE BY ACCIDENT, YOU KNOW.

YOU'VE ALL BEEN CARRYING AROUND THIS BAGGAGE. THESE REGRETS.

WE ARE THE SUM OF OUR CHOICES, I SUPPOSE. BUT A CONFLICT LIKE THIS, ONE SO COMPREHENSIVE-- IT CAN HAVE A CLEANSING EFFECT...

...HELP YOU FACE YOUR DEMONS.

SAY HELLO TO ALL YOUR GHOSTS FOR ME, TONY!

WE HAD A DEAL, ULTRON--

MM. AND WE STILL DO, STEVE. I WON'T BE INVADING YOUR LITTLE COUNTRY. BUT THE CUBE FRAGMENT IS ITS OWN ISSUE.

I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND--WHAT WAS THE POINT OF ALL THIS? THAT CHARADE BACK THERE? FOR YOU TO GIVE IN ON ACCOUNT OF SOME SENTIMENTALIST NONSENSE?

YOU KEEP CALLING ME ***ULTRON.***

WAIT, IS THAT WHY YOU--?

NO, OF COURSE NOT. I WOULD NEVER BE SO PETTY. BUT IT'S SOMETHING TO CONSIDER, ISN'T IT?

--KEEP THINGS ***INTERESTING.***

IF I ***WERE*** ULTRON, IF HE STILL CONTROLLED ME, RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND--

--AND IF HE REALLY ***DID*** BUILD THIS CITY WITH THE INTENTION OF WAITING FOR THAT APPROACHING MOMENT WHEN HUMANITY DESTROYS ITSELF--WELL, THEN IT WOULD BE EASY TO SEE WHY HE'D DO THIS, YES?

YOU'VE CONSOLIDATED SO MUCH POWER, STEVE. YOU REALLY HAVE THEM ON THE ROPES. THAT'S A RECIPE FOR PEACE, NOT WAR, ISN'T IT?

SO IT WOULD BE IN HIS INTEREST TO LEVEL THE SCALES A BIT MORE--

ULTRON SAID HE DIDN'T NEED US, MADE US WAIT ON THE JET.

HOW WAS DINNER? SMELLED GREAT.

SHUT UP.

NO LEFTOVERS, THEN.

SIX HOURS LATER.

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WORKED.

HEY, HANK'S AN OKAY GUY, HE'S JUST...GOING THROUGH KIND OF A ROUGH PATCH RIGHT NOW.

HE BASICALLY SAID HE WAS HOPING HUMANITY ERADICATES ITSELF.

I THINK HE WAS BEING DRAMATIC.

NO MATTER PYM'S STRUGGLES, WE HAVE MUCH TO BE PROUD OF, MY FRIENDS--

--IN THIS CONTEST, OUR SIDE WAS VICTORIOUS! THIS CALLS FOR HEARTY CELEBRATION!

OR BINGE WATCHING *MASTER OF NONE*.

BREAKING NEWS FROM WASHINGTON, D.C., JUST NOW--WHERE NAMOR OF ATLANTIS HAS ARRIVED ABRUPTLY, PROMISING A MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT.

WAIT-- TURN THAT UP--

CAPTAIN AMERICA, HIMSELF JUST BACK FROM A DIPLOMATIC MISSION MOMENTS AGO, HAS AGREED TO MEET WITH NAMOR AND HEAR WHAT HE HAS TO SAY--

"--AS BOTH SIDES ATTEMPT TO AVERT WHAT MANY BELIEVE IS AN INEVITABLE CONFLICT."

YOU SHOULDN'T DO THIS.

QUIET. TO PROTECT MY KINGDOM, TO PROTECT MY PEOPLE--I WILL DO WHAT I MUST.

BUT THIS--THIS ISN'T THE WAY--

WHO ARE ***YOU*** TO TELL ME WHAT IS OUR WAY?! I AM ATLANTIS' RULER--I AND I ***ALONE*** DECIDE HER DESTINY.

OR WOULD YOU HAVE ME START A WAR WE CANNOT POSSIBLY ***WIN?*** SO WE CAN WATCH FAR MORE THAN ONE TEMPLE BURN--

HE'S RIGHT--

--THERE'S NO NEED FOR ANY MORE BLOODSHED.

NAMOR. I'M GLAD YOU CAME AROUND--

YES, WELL, YOU'LL EXCUSE MY DELAY, ROGERS-- MY PEOPLE ARE MOURNING THEIR PRIESTS.

NO ONE REGRETS THAT MORE THAN ME.

IS THAT SO?

THEN WHY AM I THE ONE WHO COMES BEARING GIFTS?

--AND SO I'M CONFIDENT THAT THIS AGREEMENT SIGNALS A NEW AGE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN OUR TWO PEOPLE. HYDRA'S PROMISE OF PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH IS BEING FULFILLED HERE TODAY--

WAIT--IS HE HOLDING A-- WHAT JUST *HAPPENED?*

HE JUST GOT THE BETTER OF US IS WHAT *HAPPENED.*

UNBELIEVABLE. YOU MEAN TO TELL ME, AFTER ALL THAT--IT WAS A *DRAW?*

ALL THAT, AND HE EVENS THINGS UP WITHOUT EVEN LIFTING A DAMN FINGER.

I'LL PUT BACK THE CELEBRATORY SNACKS...

UH, TONY, IF HE KEEPS GETTING MORE FRAGMENTS ON HIS OWN--AT WHAT POINT DO YOU NOT HAVE ENOUGH TO DO...WHATEVER IT IS YOU NEED TO DO?

I--I DON'T KNOW...

I KNEW IT. THIS IS A FOOL'S ERRAND. WE SHOULD GIVE THIS UP BEFORE--

NO!

WE'RE ***NOT*** GIVING UP, AND WE'RE ***NOT*** TURNING BACK.

THIS IS THE ***MISSION.*** WE'RE GOING TO USE TONY'S DEVICE TO FIND AS MANY OF THOSE FRAGMENTS AS WE CAN.

[illegible] MEANS WE HAVE TO WORK FASTER

WELL, ***THAT*** WAS AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE. NICE TO SEE THAT ARROGANT FOOL KNEEL.

NAMOR'S DOING THE SMART THING FOR HIS PEOPLE, HELMUT. IF I WERE IN HIS POSITION, I'D DO THE SAME. I'M ***SURE*** IT WASN'T ***EASY.***

AT ANY RATE, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU RIGHTFULLY VICTORIOUS--ESPECIALLY AFTER ULTRON'S INEXCUSABLE DEFIANCE. AND TRUST ME--

--WE WILL AVENGE THAT INDIGNITY, MY FRIEND. AND WE WON'T ALLOW THESE CRIMINALS TO ABSCOND WITH WHAT IS ***RIGHTFULLY YOURS.***

IT DOESN'T MATTER. LET TONY'S GROUP GATHER UP AS MANY FRAGMENTS AS THEY CAN MANAGE. IT WON'T CHANGE THE OUTCOME. AFTER ALL--

"--WE HAVE SOMEONE ON THE *INSIDE.*"

TO BE CONTINUED!

Secret Empire

June

Secret Empire: Brave New World #1 & #2

The Invaders return...and a new Patriot is born!

Captain America: Steve Rogers #18

Will Namor and Black Panther kneel before Hydra?

Captain America: Sam Wilson #23

Sam leads Tony Stark's team on a daring escape from the U.S.!

Beyond the Shield

Guardians Annual #1

The Guardians search for a weapon that can turn the tide against the Chitauri!

The Mighty Captain Marvel #6

The battle against the Chitauri rages on, but Captain Marvel's forces are running out of hope.

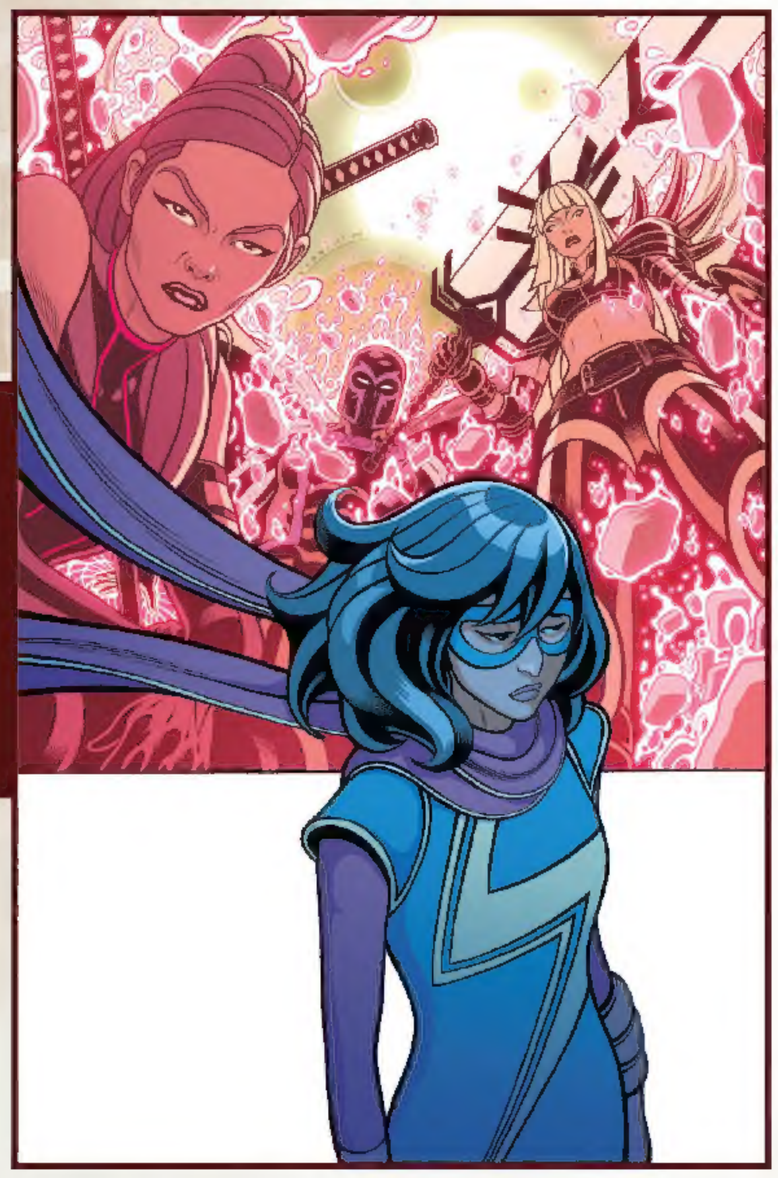
Deadpool #32

Captain America wouldn't steer Deadpool wrong... right?

Secret Empire

June

Secret Warriors #3



How far will Ms. Marvel go to protect Inhumans from Hydra?

U.S.Avengers #7

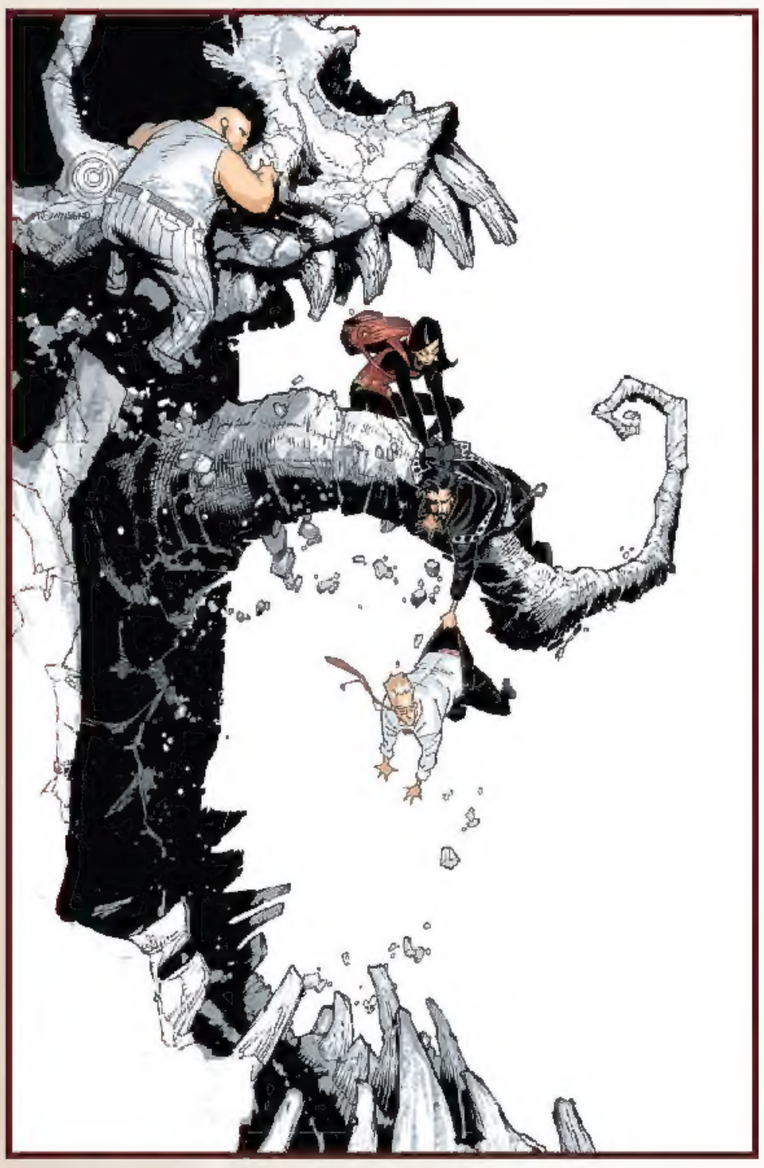
Avengers of Europe, assemble!

Occupy Avengers #8

Hawkeye's champions of the people make one last stand against Hydra.

Darkforce New York

Doctor Strange #22



Doctor Strange finds an unlikely ally in the fight against the Darkforce: Wilson Fisk.

Uncanny Avengers #24

Tricked by their former leader and isolated in the Darkforce, the Unity Squad fights to survive.

Amazing Spider-Man #29

Superior Octopus is back-- and he's after Parker Industries!

SECRET EMPIRE

NEXT

TONY STARK'S MISSION TO SAVE CAPTAIN AMERICA FALTERS, AND THE UNDERGROUND'S TIME IS RUNNING OUT.

SECRET EMPIRE: UNDERGROUND #1

THE HEROES OF THE UNDERGROUND RACE CAPTAIN AMERICA TO A COSMIC CUBE FRAGMENT IN THE SAVAGE LAND!

SECRET EMPIRE: UNITED #1

TENSIONS ARE RISING IN THE MUTANT HOMELAND OF NEW TIAN, AND STEVE ROGERS ISN'T HAPPY ABOUT IT.

ZONE